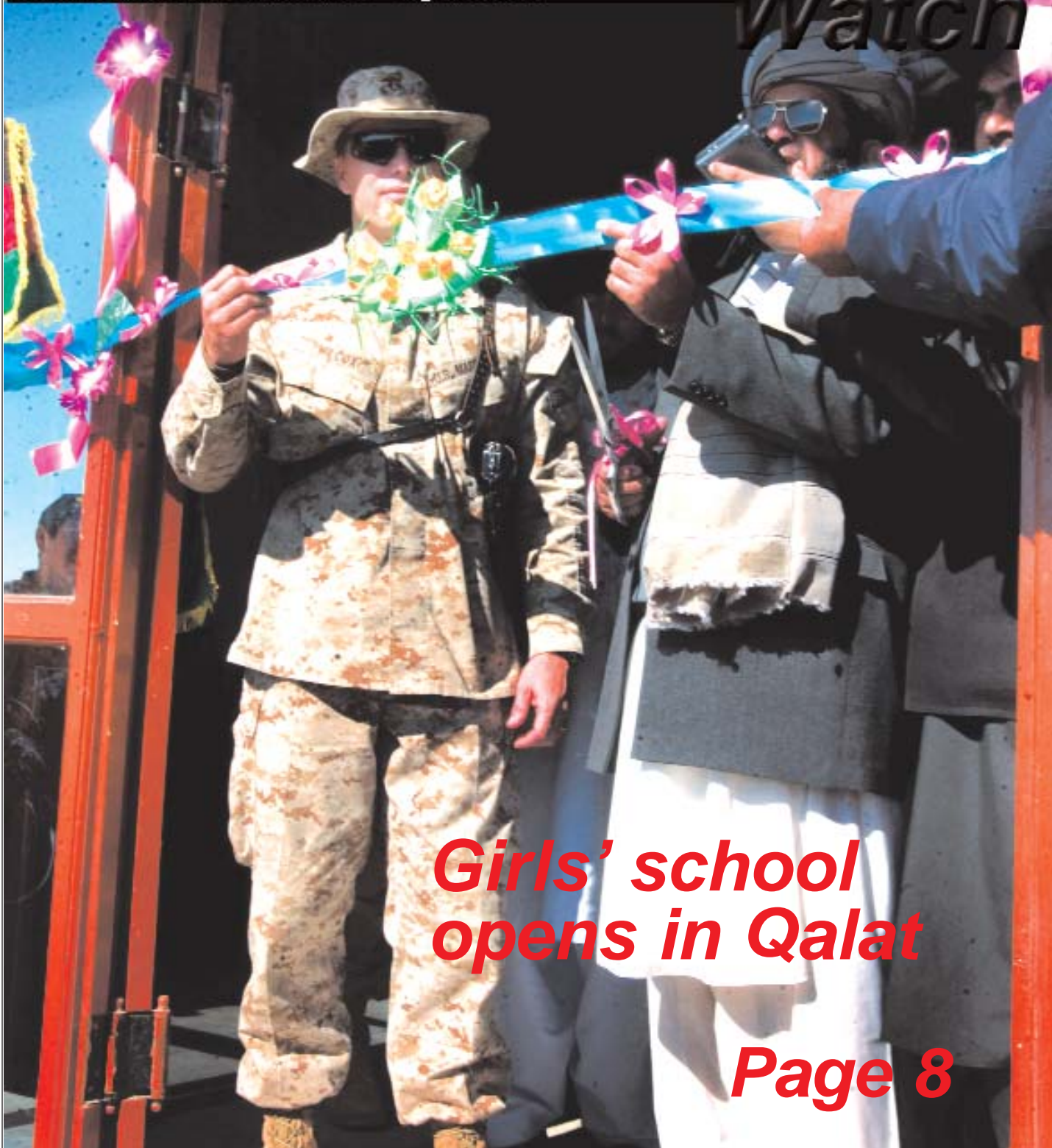


Afghanistan **Freedom**

December 12, 2005

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan

Watch



***Girls' school
opens in Qalat***

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Air Force Maj. Gen. John Brennan, Office of Security Cooperation – Afghanistan chief, addresses a class of Afghan National Police trainees during a recent tour of the regional training center in Mazar-e-Sharif. The general told the trainees that they play an important part in keeping Afghanistan a safe and secure country.

Photo by Army Sgt. Mason Lowery, Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan Public Affairs

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Afghanistan Freedom Watch

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan

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Freedom Watch Staff

Commander - Maj. T.G. Taylor
NCOIC - Staff Sgt. Matthew MacRoberts
Editor - Sgt. James-Denton Wyllie
Journalists - Staff Sgt. Ken Denny,
Sgt. Douglas DeMaio, Spc. Jason Krawczyk,
Spc. Tiffany Evans, Pfc. Vincent Fusco

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Answering the question: Why did I join the military?

**By Army Sgt.
Douglas Demaio**
*20th Public Affairs
Detachment*

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Recently, I received an e-mail from a friend I hadn't seen or heard from in 10 years.

After reacquainting ourselves with one another and discussing how our lives have changed over the past decade, my friend posed a question to me that I really hadn't thought about in some time.

"Why did you join the military," she asked.

Being my neighbor in college, she had come to know me as the typical college

guy - the guy who made it home from a night of partying just in time to go to his 10 a.m. class. When she found out that I joined the military, she was a bit surprised to find out that I had chosen a path of servitude instead of doing something that served only me.

My response to her question was clear and to the point.

"I felt compelled to serve as only a free man can," I said.

I think most service members realize that volunteering for the military is a choice that says a lot about us as individuals. It tells our fellow compatriots that we are committed to the welfare of our nation. It tells them we have

a desire to place others' needs above our own. But most importantly, volunteering for the military gives meaning to words like loyalty, honor, sacrifice and selfless service.

We may not be the people we were a decade ago, but we are better for doing something not for ourselves, but for our fellow citizens.

Most of our fellow citizens acknowledge our service as a mark of respect to them, and that we can be thankful for.

Joining the military has opened my eyes to a world I never knew existed. It has fine-tuned my strengths and improved my weaknesses. One of my weaknesses when I first joined was writing, which is ironic now that I'm

a journalist for the military. I recall when I joined to become a journalist for the military that this would be an opportunity for me to improve on the skills that I lacked.

The military has given me the confidence to achieve more than I ever thought possible.

It has given me an understanding about the importance of adapting to any situation, paying attention to details and setting a good example.

So, if there's a college student out there partying like I once did, the question for him or her shouldn't be why join the military; the question should be, why not join the military?



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

A group of Afghan National Army soldiers practices combat-medical skills they learned during a class at the 207th Corps Garrison Regional Training Center at Herat.

Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates, Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan Public Affairs

If you have high-quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to freedomwatch@baf.afgn.army.mil. Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.

Foundation receives school supplies

By Army Sgt. Phillip Chang
117th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment

KABUL, Afghanistan - A pack of pink drawing paper, a set of multi-colored pencils and a backpack was all it took to put a smile on one student's face in Afghanistan.

The student, Shkiba, was one of almost 250 in the Professional and Learning Foundation School for the Disabled and Girls, to receive school supplies and shirts with the colors of the Afghan flag. Soldiers from the Afghan National Army distributed school supplies to students of the school herein Kabul, Afghanistan, Thursday. The school was chosen in recognition for the International Day of the Disabled which was Dec. 3.

The soldiers are part of the Directorate of Cultural and Religious Affairs, and the supplies were donated from Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan and the United States Assistance for International Development with participation from the International Security Assistance Force.

Sayed Mohammad Hadi Hadi, Deputy Minister of Martyrs and Disabled, who also handed out supplies to the students.

During his speech, Hadi said, "I am thankful for the cooperation and coordination from ISAF and CFC-A. I am also thankful for the donations for the students and disabled."

Suraya Omeri, director of the school, was also appreciative of the donations. "While the Taliban was in power, girls were not allowed to go to school. The school was founded to help the disabled and girls get their education" said Omeri. "These gifts will help the students in their progress."

Students shared their thoughts with the deputy minister and director as they shook hands and acknowledged their thanks for the gifts.

Muxgan Ahmadi, one of the attending students said, "We are thankful for the gifts of book bags and school supplies, these will help us learn."

Romanian Lt. Col. Mircea A. Romocia and U.S. Army Lt. Col. Robert Roseman, members of the Ministry Engagement Team for CFC-A, coordinated the event.

"This is an example of the Afghan



Photo by Army Sgt. Phillip Chang

Suraya Omeri, director of the Professional Foundation School for the Disabled and Girls, presents a new backpack to one of her students.

government working together to support the Afghan people," said Roseman after the event.

"We just came by to help the ministry with its steps in providing for the next generation," said Romocia.

At the end of the ceremony, Shkiba handed one of the soldiers a sketch of a boy crying.

"I wanted to show how it was here before we were free," said Shkiba, as she admired her sketch before presenting it. "This is also to show how happy I am now."

Dari/Pashtu phrase of the week



Afghan cultural tidbit

How are you?

Dari

Chi-hal darid?

(Chee-hawl dah-rid)

Pashtu

Sa-hal da?

(Saw-hawl dah)

Afghan bread comes in slabs or in round flat loaves (not to be confused with the now commonly sold Middle Eastern pita bread) that have been baked in large clay ovens called tandoors. Afghan bread is generally available in Middle Eastern grocery stores and in mainstream grocery stores in cities with large Afghan populations.

Army Humvee strikes anti-tank mine outside Bagram Airfield's front gate

By Army Spc. Jason Krawczyk
20th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - A U.S. Army Humvee struck an anti-tank mine 100 meters outside Bagram Airfield front gate Nov. 29. No one was injured in the incident.

"The Humvee lifted four feet off the ground, tilted sideways, and then slammed back down on its wheels," said Army Spc. Thomas Kiser, 1st Battalion, 114th Field Artillery, who witnessed the incident from a guard tower. "Then the driver's door kicked open and the driver yelled 'I'm ok!'"

The Humvee was using a well-used turn around area when it sunk in a fresh mud hole. Hidden in that hole was an anti-tank mine. The mine had been there for some time and was most likely planted during the Soviet occupation.

"The area has been used to turn around for some time. I myself have stood in the exact spot the mine was," said Kiser.

Weather played the determining role in the mine being set off. "When the ground is dry and hard a vehicle's or person's weight is distributed over a larger area. When the ground becomes soft, due to rain, that weight is pin pointed to the area directly below the object," said U.S. Marine Gunnery Sgt. Michael Messina, mine action center staff noncommissioned officer in charge.

After the strike, the driver crawled from the vehicle to the roof and waited for an explosive ordnance disposal team to arrive and clear a safe path out of the minefield.

Once the driver was rescued, the mission of recovering the vehicle began.

The mine reaction team arrived and started to clear the area



Photo by Army Spc. Jason Krawczyk

The remains of a Humvee that struck an anti-tank mine 100 meters outside of Bagram Airfield's front gate.

around the vehicle. "The team works in 30 minute shifts and the process is slow but the safest way to clear an area," said Messina.

"Had the Humvee been traveling faster or slower and more to the left or right, that Soldier would not be here today," said Messina.

Afghanistan is one of the heaviest mined countries in the world. Fall and spring are when the mines pose the most danger and when people should exercise extra caution.

Enduring Voices

How do you feel about the Army's decision to keep its deployments at one year?



Army Capt. Paul Schultz, 18th Engineer Brigade
"I think the high op-tempo has a negative impact on the Soldiers' morale, their families and retention."



Army Spc. Adam Schaefer, B Co., 7th Bn., 159th Aviation Regiment
"I don't think a year is too much. If they made this a permanent duty assignment, enough people would probably sign up once the United Nations moved in."



Air Force Senior Airman Daniel Cintron, 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron
"I think all services should be treated equally. If they're going to do one year, it should be for everyone."



Tad Harris, Bagram USO
"Being an Army vet, I think that each service has different needs and op-tempo to accomplish the mission."

Air Force Senior Airman Edward Stottlemeyer, munitions inspector, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Munitions Flight, inspects a bomb-fuse initiator at Bagram Airfield.

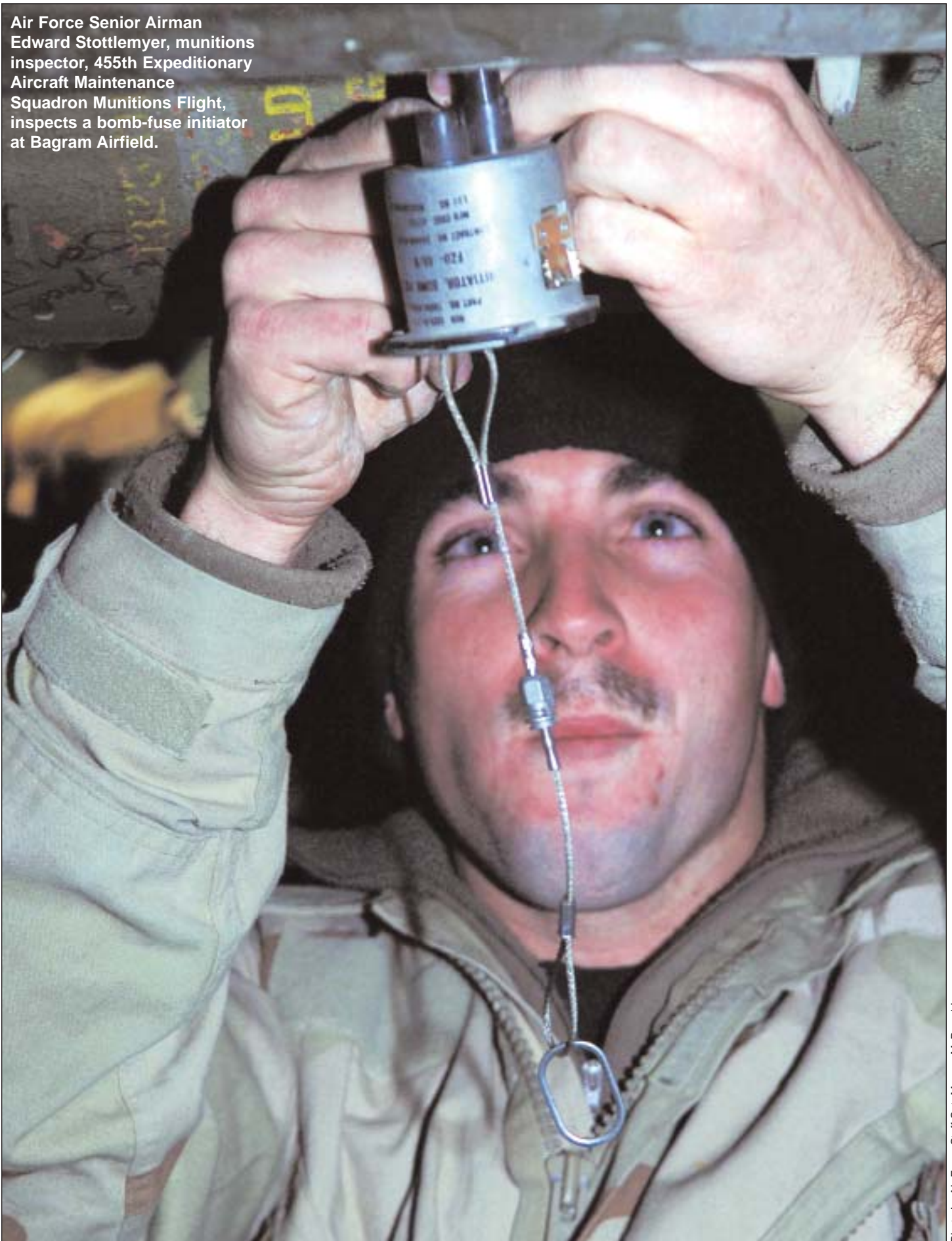


Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald

Ammo warriors helps keep close-air support a reality

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald
455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Keeping a mission-capable supply of bullets coming as A-10 Thunderbolt II pilots respond to requests for close-air support is a key role for a group of Airmen taking part in the ongoing Global War on Terrorism.

Deployed here from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., the Airmen of the 455th Air Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Munitions Flight provide ammunition to those experiencing first-hand combat with the enemy.

"Our job is to fully maintain, assemble and deliver a ready supply of ammunition for all A-10 operations in support of Marine, Army and other Coalition forces fighting on the front lines in the war on terrorism," said Air Force 2nd Lt. J. Brent McCraney, munitions flight commander, a native of Charlotte, N.C.

Coalition aircraft, as well as various support agencies, deployed here benefit from the work of the munitions flight.

"If C-130 (Hercules) or C-17 (Globemaster IIIs) need a resupply of defensive countermeasures, we're here to take care of them," said Air Force Master Sgt. Christopher Nastase, munitions systems superintendent. "We also account for and maintain munitions for some deployed Coalition aircraft as well as 11 on-base customer accounts, such as security forces and explosive ordnance disposal."

Nastase, a native of Omaha, Neb., said his team of warriors makes the A-10 mission possible.

"Without us, the A-10s wouldn't have much impact in supporting the troops on the ground," said Nastase. "We help make all this a reality."

Air Force Senior Airman Matthew Logue, conventional maintenance crewmember, said he's enjoying his deployment here.

"Unlike back home, this is no longer a



Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Todd Wilds, munitions flight shift supervisor, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Munitions Flight, processes 30 mm high-explosive cannon ammunition using a GFU-7, which separates the brass from ammunition downloaded from A-10 Thunderbolt IIs and returns the good rounds to another can, making them capable for reloading onto aircraft.

training environment," he said. "Dealing with the real munitions every day is a nice change."

When he lays his head down at night, Logue, a native of Atoka, Okla., said he feels as though he and his co-workers made a difference in the lives of others.

"Every piece of munitions an A-10 pilot uses to save the life of any of our guys or to end the life of a terrorist - I know we had a hand in it," he said. "Anything we can do to help stop the

growing threat of terrorism across the globe is worth the effort. Isn't this the reason why we're all serving in today's military?"

Since Sept. 15, the 455th EAMXS Munitions Flight has loaded more than 23,000 rounds of 30 mm ammunition, 15,000 countermeasures, 103 2.75-inch rockets, 14 MK-82 500-pound air burst bombs and nine GBU-12 laser-guided bombs supporting the Global War on Terrorism.

A crowd of women, children, students and Coalition personnel listens to speeches, poetry and songs in honor of the opening of the new Qalat Girls' School.





Giving knowledge

New girls' school brings opportunities to Qalat children

By Army Spc. Tiffany Evans
20th Public Affairs Detachment

QALAT, Afghanistan - A new building to house a girls' school opened Nov. 21 in downtown Qalat, a district in Zabul Province.

"For the past few months, the girls have been having classes in tents and are very excited to finally have a real school building," said Air Force 1st Lt. Ethan Haynes, 37th Civil Engineer Squadron general engineer.

While building the new school, members of the Qalat Provincial Reconstruction Team decided to add a basketball court to the school grounds for the girls, said Haynes. As the school was being built, Haynes and other service members would stop by and play basketball or soccer with the girls.

"This is one of our most important projects," said Marine Lt. Col. Andy Wilcox, Qalat PRT commander. "Helping to empower the girls is a critical step toward progress and overcoming the mentality of the Taliban."

Today, Afghan women have rights, but many still have no idea that they have these rights or even what rights they have, said Wilcox. By educating the girls of Afghanistan, the PRT is helping to ensure that when they grow up, mentally and skillfully, they will be on equal footing with the men.

"We appreciate all that the Coalition has done for us," said Zabul Province's governor, Armand. "Thanks to the PRT, we now have a Qalat Girls' School Basketball Team, which received new shoes and jerseys from the Americans during the opening ceremony."

Afghanistan is progressing, and Afghans are starting to throw off their shackles from the Taliban regime more and more every day, said Armand. There is great joy and trust that Qalat citizens said they have for the Coalition members working to rebuild their town.

"Truly a great thing has been accomplished by building and opening the girls' school," said Armand. "As I've heard some of the Americans say, the children surely are our future, and the biggest changes start with them."

Air Force 1st. Lt. Ethan Haynes, (right) general engineer, 37th Civil Engineer Squadron welcomes the guests to the opening of the new Qalat Girl's School, while interpreter Jahan translates.





Photo by Army Sgt. Douglas DeMaio

Army Spc. Maxey Parish sets up his area and prepares for a day of duty at an entrance control point on Bagram Airfield. Parish and other members of his unit trained to deploy as a "provisional" military police.

From artillerymen to military policemen, Soldiers respond to provisional job

By Army Sgt. Douglas DeMaio
20th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Like many in his unit, when Army Sgt. Christopher Johnson first heard that his field artillery unit was going to train to deploy as "provisional" military police, he didn't really like the idea.

Since then, Johnson and many in his unit have warmed up to the idea of serving as MPs, Johnson said.

These Mississippi National Guardsmen, from A Battery, 1st Battalion, 114th Field Artillery, mobilized at Fort Dix, N.J., and trained more than two months to learn the skills the artillerymen are now using while providing force protection here.

These "provisional" MPs serve as entrance control point security.

"We're the first line of defense," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Higdon, assistant operations sergeant.

Their duties can range from riot control to searching vehicles, he said.

Johnson, the noncommissioned offi-

cer in charge for searching vehicles entering the base, said his "main job is to search vehicles for contraband, explosives or anything that might be harmful to the base.

"That is truly important, because I'm protecting the lives of everyone on base," he said.

Every day, these Soldiers suit up to serve the service members and civilian contractors they shield from harm, provide support for the entrance of logistical supplies and assist locals who come to the front gate seeking medical attention.

Working at the front entrance can be a challenging, yet rewarding experience, said Johnson.

In fact, the basic medical skills Soldiers possess have become very useful to the provisional MPs, Johnson said.

"A lot of people come in here every day injured," he said. "The combat lifesavers have trained and given me the know-how to do what they do."

"I've become pretty comfortable with

(using the medical skills I've learned)," Johnson said.

Yet Johnson said that all the skills he has learned in the Army have been useful to becoming a provisional MP.

When the Soldiers first arrived in country, they weren't sure what they were going to do, Higdon said.

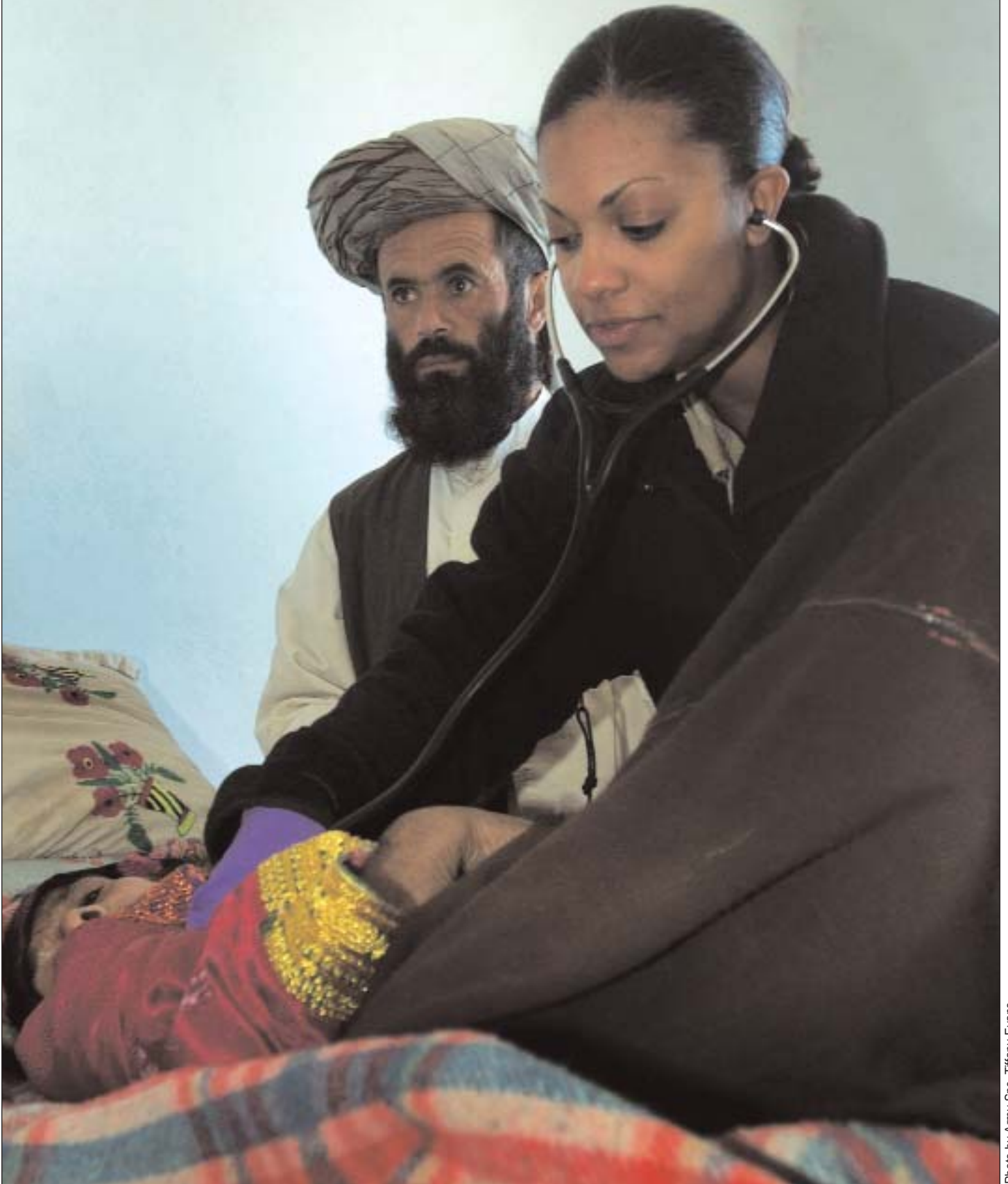
"We could have done other jobs, but once we got on ground, we were tasked to do this," Higdon said. "And we've taken it and run with it and have done the best we could.

We do a good job and feel like we're important to the operations here on Bagram."

With confidence in their job and knowing they're making a difference for those working on base, it is no wonder why many of the Soldiers in the unit reiterate, Johnson's comments, Higdon said.

"I never thought that I would do an MP job," Johnson said. "But now that I'm doing it, I could see myself having a career as a police officer or security guard."

Army Dr. (Capt.) Jacquelin Naylor listens for fluid in an Afghan woman's lungs.



Medical outreach program brings care to women in Zabul Province

By Army Spc. Tiffany Evans
20th Public Affairs Detachment

ZABUL PROVINCE, Afghanistan - A village medical outreach was held Nov. 21 to 23 in Qalat and Shah Joy, districts of Zabul Province to highlight the openings of the Qalat Girls' School and Shah Joy Women's Clinic.

Recently, the Qalat Provincial Reconstruction Team finished two construction projects on a girls' school and women's clinic as part of the rebuilding of Zabul Province.

"Going along with the openings of the school and clinic, we wanted to keep a constant theme on females so the VMO catered to women and children only," said Army Staff Sgt. Abbi Hoffpauir, medic, 3rd Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment.

The outreach program was held at the girls' school Nov. 21 and 23, and Nov. 22 at the clinic, said Hoffpauir. The Zabul Minister of Health, Dr. Shah, was present throughout the three-day medical assistance mission and assisted by seeing patients.

For this medical outreach to be successful, many different service members had to pull together to help the

mission run smoothly.

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment, and the 173rd Separates Battalion (Airborne) joined the Embedded Training Team, Afghan National Army, Special Forces, Tactical Humint Team, and service members attached to the Qalat PRT.

"All had a hand in the VMO," said Army Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Barteau, 173rd SB. "Without proper security and regulating the flow of patients in to see the doctors, it would have been a mad house."

Soldiers provided an extra hand inside the clinic during emergencies, like a girl who had a seizure and a woman who was in labor, said Barteau.

"Working with a new set of people, watching the dental team and checking out how the optometrist works without equipment were highlights for me," said Army Spc. Brian Fitzsimons, the command sergeant major's driver, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 173rd SB. "This experience has opened my eyes to how much I should cherish my family."

"For us to truly change this country, we need to set a good example for the



Photos by Army Spc. Tiffany Evans

An Afghan woman has her eyes checked to see if she needs glasses or if she has an eye disease.

Afghans," said Fitzsimons. "We need to show the Afghans that men and women are equal, show them proper respect for women and continue to treat all Afghans with the utmost respect."



A severely dehydrated and malnourished Afghan infant stops crying after being treated by Army medics.

Burning Taliban bodies deemed poor judgment, not war crimes

By Kathleen T. Rhem
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - The decision by U.S. Soldiers to burn the bodies of two enemy Taliban fighters was an act of poor judgment, but not a violation of the laws of war, U.S. officials have determined.

Officials also determined that using the act to incite Taliban fighters by announcing it over psychological operations loudspeakers was a separate act. In all, four Soldiers have received administrative punishment in the two incidents.

"Based on the criminal investigation, there was no evidence to substantiate the allegation of desecration or any violation of the Law of War," according to an executive summary of the official investigation report from Combined Joint Task Force 76. "However, there was evidence of poor decision-making and judgment, poor reporting and lack of knowledge and respect for local Afghan customs and tradition."

The report refers to an investigation into a widely reported incident Oct. 1 in Gumbad, Afghanistan, in which U. S. Soldiers burned the bodies of two enemy fighters and psychological operations forces announced the burning to incite Taliban fighters.

Coalition forces know the location as an area of enemy activity, officials said. A Sept. 30 engagement killed two enemy fighters, and local citizens had not retrieved the bodies 24 hours later. An officer on the ground decided it best to burn the bodies for hygienic reasons.

When apprised of the act, the unit's battalion commander ordered the bodies extinguished, and the troops on the ground complied immediately. However, a psychological operations team operating in the area heard of the incident via local tactical radio traffic and broadcasted information about it toward the village and toward local mountains in which enemy forces were suspected of hiding.

As a result of this investi-

gation, four Soldiers were reprimanded. Two of them, the PSYOPS specialists, received "nonjudicial punishment," administrative punishment imposed by a commander for wrongdoing that doesn't rise to a criminal level. Such punishment can result in fines, extra duties and short-term confinement, but no details were released on the extent of circumstances in this incident.

"These were all nonjudicial, administrative actions that were taken," Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said Nov. 29.

The investigation found the Soldiers decided to burn the bodies believing it was the best course of action and knowing cremation of enemy remains is allowed under the Geneva Conventions.

"The Soldiers at Gumbad did not have a thorough knowledge of the local Afghan traditions with respect to burial," the report summary states.

"This incident was the first time that this unit had killed enemy combatants at close range and had to determine

what to do with the remains."

Islamic custom forbids cremation.

Task force officials acknowledge the burning was wrong and have ordered training on Afghan sensitivities for all troops in the command, officials said.

Regarding the loudspeaker broadcasts, investigating officials found no evidence that the bodies were burned for the psychological effect. However, the report states, the broadcasts were "in violation of standing policies for the content of loudspeaker messages."

The operator and his supervisor have been reassigned to other duties, officials said.

"CJTF 76 investigations identified two separate but related incidents that highlighted poor judgment and a lack of Afghan cultural knowledge - not Law of War violations," officials said in the investigation report summary.

"The judgment errors are serious and have been corrected with administrative action and training."

President remembers deployed troops at tree-lighting ceremony

By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - President George W. Bush remembered America's deployed service members he said are "serving the cause of peace" during the Dec. 1 Christmas Pageant of Peace and lighting of the national Christmas tree here.

"We ask for God to watch over our men and women in uniform who are serving overseas," the president said during the ceremony on the Ellipse. "Their families miss them, hold a seat open for them and

pray for their safe return."

America's men and women stand for freedom and serve the cause of peace, he said.

"Many of them are serving in distant lands tonight, but they are close to our hearts," the president said.

"As we approach Christmas in this time of war, we pray for freedom and justice and peace on earth," he said.

President Bush recalled President Franklin Roosevelt's address to the nation during Christmas Eve in 1941, weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and

the United States' entry into World War II.

"Against enemies who preach the principles of hate and practice them, we set our faith in human love and in God's care for us and all men everywhere," the president said, quoting President Roosevelt.

Following his statement, the president and first lady flicked a switch, illuminating the 40-foot Colorado blue spruce that stands just south of the White House.

It will remain in place and open for public visits through the holiday season.



Photos by Army Sgt. Chuck D. Meseke

A C-130 Hercules taxis at the newly opened Gardez Airport on Nov. 22.

Airport opens, serves Gardez

By Army Sgt. Chuck D. Meseke
Combined Task Force Devil Public Affairs

GARDEZ, Afghanistan - U.N. representatives, Government of Afghanistan officials and Coalition forces commanders gathered at a newly reconstructed airstrip on the outskirts of Gardez for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Gardez Airport on Nov. 23.

The airport is the first air access to the region since Soviet forces left the embattled airstrip strewn with broken armor and artillery equipment.

The project was jointly funded by the World Bank and the United States Assistance for International Development through the local Coalition provincial reconstruction team. It cost more than \$500,000. The contracts were awarded to local Afghan construction companies.



An Air Force C-130 Hercules unloads civic assistance supplies at the newly opened Gardez Airport on Nov. 23.

Freedom Watch

December 12, 2005

**"Skill and confidence are an
unconquered army."**

**George Herbert
(Philosopher)**



Army Sgt. Ranzo Letona releases a round into a mortar tube during a Soldier of the month board competition in Orgun-E. Photo by Army Sgt. Douglas DeMato, 20th Public Affairs Detachment.